



BLACK LEADERSHIP FORUM, INC.

October 19, 2006

Chairman Kevin Martin
Commissioners Michael Copps
Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20554

Commissioner Jonathan Adelstein
Commissioner Robert McDowell

Dear FCC Chairman & Commissioners:

As the Federal Communications Commission reviews the proposed merger between AT&T and BellSouth, the Black Leadership Forum (BLF) encourages you to approve this union of two leading innovators in our economy. A tenet of BLF has been to always advocate for and on behalf of public policies that allow African Americans to expand their opportunities to fully participate in American social, economic, and political life. By extending improved and more affordable telecommunications services to millions of African American consumers, we believe this merger will work to that end.

Additionally, we strongly urge you to consider the recent conditions offered by AT&T/BellSouth, proposals that only make an AT&T-BellSouth merger more consumer-friendly. While consumers must be protected, we think sufficient competition in the telecommunications industry combined with these proposed commitments appropriately and adequately addresses this need.

Across the spectrum of technologies that a merged AT&T will be able to offer, consumers will benefit from low prices and a more reliable network. As part of its conditions, AT&T has pledged to offer broadband connection at a rate of \$10 per month and provide a broadband modem free of charge to all subscribers. After a successful merger, the company also promises that at least 30% of new incremental deployment will be to rural areas and low-income housing units. These combined factors will extend valuable technology to many people who currently go without it.

Perhaps just as important is the fact that AT&T vows to provide broadband Internet access to all residences in the AT&T/BellSouth footprint. Additionally, AT&T will not raise rates for unbundled network elements for at least 30 months. For the many consumers who currently lack broadband access, especially in low-income communities, this means access could soon be obtained without the worry of incessantly-raised prices. Such a consumer benefit must not be undervalued.



BLACK LEADERSHIP FORUM, INC.

The Black leadership Forum also believes that this merger provides an extraordinary opportunity for creating viable and sustainable economic development in the African-American community. The Black Leadership Forum believes that in every industry African-Americans must go beyond being a simple consumer. In Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana and Maryland African-American business account for 12-15% of the states total businesses and growing. It is our hope as the AT&T/BellSouth merger evolves all parties will continue to encourage minority contracting opportunities, entrepreneurial venues and job creation across the new AT&T/Bell South footprint.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Joe Leonard, Jr., Ph.D.
Executive Director
Black Leadership Forum